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for the fight against poverty**

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.15856826](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15856826)**Euro-Mediterranean relations and international cooperation
for the fight against poverty**

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Abstract: The present paper seeks to analyze through the contemporary international law the fight against poverty, that is relevant to the debate on the goals of sustainable development. Binding norms, that highlight the goal of eradicating poverty globally through the analysis of economic and social rights as well as through soft law instruments, form standards in state practice that respect international actors acting in the field of international cooperation against poverty. Basic requirements are important for international cooperation that respects the principle of solidarity, the allocation of resources and the goals of sustainable development as well as the adoption of the Human

Rights Impact Assessments HRIA. Euro-Mediterranean relations, the Neighbourhood Policy as well as the activities within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean put into practice and highlight the formation of standards that are essential for international cooperation consistent with the goal of eradicating poverty.

Keywords: HRIA; international cooperation; poverty; inequalities; international solidarity; protection of human rights; neighbourhood policy; Barcelona process.

Introduction

International cooperation has to do with the phenomenon of support and help regarding poverty. The origins of this structural problem are found in societies, individuals and groups that suffer from a lack of resources. A lack that reflects a large part of the community. Poverty should not be concentrated only in countries such as Africa and Asia but also to law deficiencies and to the decolonization process (Ravallion, 2016).

The challenge of poverty is considered at a universal level.¹ It is protected by international law and especially by human rights highlighting from soft law the establishment of a mandate of human rights and extreme poverty,² that is affirmed as an objective in the 2030 agenda of the UN.³

The protection of human rights through international law does not arise from binding norms that refer to the issue of poverty for states but from norms of the International Pact on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (IPESCR) relating to the right,

1See: Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, UN Doc. A/CONF.166/9 of 14 March 1995, Chapter I, Annex I: “(...) commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind (...)”.

2Commission for Human Rights, Resolution 1998/25, Human rights and extreme poverty, UN Doc. E/1998/23-E/CN.4/1998/177 of 17 April 1998, pp. 94-97.

3General Assembly, Resolution n. 70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN DOC. A/RES/70/1 of 21 October 2015.

standard of living, health, education as a goal of the international community fighting against poverty (Saul, Kinley, Mowbray, 2014; Aoife, 2019).⁴

In Art. 11 IPESCR it is stated that: “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living” corresponds to a multidimensional level that concerns poverty as stated in the discussions of international law (Fredman, 2020; Cullet, 2022).

Art. 11 IPESCR highlights the international dimension of the fight against poverty and the right to freedom for individuals. This article highlights international cooperation that is based on free consent implementing international obligations in the area of protection through adequate standards of living (De Schutter, 2012).

⁴Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Substantive issues arising in the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: poverty and the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. Statement adopted by the committee on economic, social and cultural rights on 4 May 2001, UN Doc. E/C.12/2001/10 of 10 May 2001.

International cooperation for the fight against poverty collaborates with actions related to development, that participates in sustainable development and in the dimension against inequalities and the equitable use of available resources. International cooperation in the field of sustainable development has boundaries, definitions that are variable and that cannot go beyond the respect of intergenerational equity as well as the eradication and reduction of poverty (Barral, 2012).

The fight against poverty since the birth of the UN has become one of the main objectives of the international community including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The fight against poverty comes through the allocation of funds from rich to developing countries, as a main instrument for international cooperation representing thus the scope of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Pogge, 2002).

These resources are the result of an effective management for the beneficiary states. Industrialized states are allocated the resources necessary to guarantee a minimum income. International

cooperation as a type of institution that has transformative capacity is necessary and becomes effective through adequate funds to achieve the long-term objective of eradicating poverty in a way that is respectful of the social and cultural dynamics of the recipient countries, that realize the needs of the local community through respect for fundamental rights.

A setting that can be found in the European Union has taken on a central role in the fight against poverty. It takes on an internal and external dimension through international relations with countries that reflect a vision of fair and sustainable development.⁵

⁵Joint Declaration of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on the European Union's development policy entitled 'The European Consensus', in OJ EU C 46 of 24 February 2006, p. 1; European Parliament, European Parliament Resolution of 3 July 2012 on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: current practices and future prospects, in particular in the Mediterranean, in OJEU C 349 E/1 of 3 July 2012.

The evolution of international cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean area measures the tools, actions of international actors that are oriented towards poverty and the guarantee of well-being and sustainable development in the areas that are disadvantaged in the south of the Mediterranean.

International cooperation, in a specific geographical area, represents a source of reflection that allows legal instruments to offer objectives for the fight against poverty to international actors within the scope of a form of cooperation, that is implemented within the context of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

In this way, the principles that inspire the cooperation that verifies the UfM as a response to the eradication of poverty, according to the 2030 agenda, primary law and soft law instruments are identified.

It is noted that the Euro-Mediterranean training phases, as a measure of action for international actors, are involved in the realization of the basic needs of people, vulnerable groups of people, the formation of binding standards in the field of

cooperation against poverty within the legal framework of international cooperation for sustainable development.

Solidarity, poverty alleviation and global assistance

Rich subjects help the state of need as a valid consideration within the scope of relations and action by international actors. Legal norms are identified to regulate the action of states in the sector of international cooperation against poverty.

State practice allocates aid through ODA funds and forms of cooperation, that analyze the declarations and positions, that are adopted by various states in the so-called Global North⁶ which in

⁶Commission for Human Rights, Report of the Open-Ended Working Group to Consider Options Regarding the Elaboration of an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Its Second Session, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/52 of 10 February 2005: “(...) representatives of the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Canada, France and Portugal believed that international cooperation and assistance was an important moral obligation but not a legal entitlement, and did not interpret the Covenant to impose a legal obligation to provide development assistance or give a legal title to receive such aid (...)”.

practice is voluntary and does not constitute a legal obligation.

Alston, in this regard, affirms that is:

“(...) difficult for countries to insist that they have persistently objected to such an evolution if they continue (...) to assisting developing country governments to achieve targets as tangible and clearly achievable as the MDGs (...)” (Alston, 2005).

The existence of an international obligation of customary nature in the field of international assistance for people in poverty is a limit of a narrow international assistance that works for relations in the Euro-Mediterranean area sector. It refers to voluntary commitments in the field of combating poverty of international actors that follow the objective of eradicating poverty through international cooperation that respects the rules, principles deriving from international human rights law and soft law instruments.

This voluntary phase for cooperation against poverty does not exclude the process of formation for the norms of customary nature thus providing for the obligation of assistance (Sepúlveda, 2006; Vandenhoe, 2009), as well as the recognition of binding

norms for international law and human rights in the field of poverty (Clapham, 2006; Lavrysen, 2015; Pribytkova, 2019).

Voluntary commitments highlight binding aspects that go beyond recognition for moral obligations (Beitz, 1998; K  ng, 1998; Maffettone, Rathore, 2012). Thus, the analysis of a practice for cooperation in the Mediterranean area and in the field of cooperation against poverty is noted and international actors, who are bound to respect minimum standards act in the sector consistent with the objective that eradicates poverty (Alston, 2004).

International cooperation standards are capable of combating poverty and are verified by states through objectives that adopt Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in practice.

The 2030 Agenda has identified this process as a matter for the fight against poverty, thus confirming other studies from other sciences, according to which poverty is not a fault that results from the choices of individuals but a problem of collective responsibility.

Contemporary international law and the sustainable development goals recognize poverty as a fault for the individual, who is part of the international community. The causes and solutions to this problem depend on the conduct of a plurality of actors, who identify positive actions.

The countries of the Global North remove the economic barriers that perpetuate poverty and the rich countries provide economic aid that contributes to the reform of global economic structures that favor inequalities, which hinder sustainable development (Pasquali, 2023).⁷

States as a support of international assistance fight poverty through actions that are based on the principle of solidarity that tends to institutionalize international cooperation. An institutionalization that is necessary for stable structures that allow for an effective coordination of global efforts against poverty that avoid ineffective interventions (Liakopoulos, 2025).

⁷Council of Human Rights, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter. Final report: The transformative potential of the right to food, UN Doc. A/HRC/25/57 of 24 January 2014.

Action and effectiveness are key elements for international cooperation. In this way, the so-called phantom aid (Hynes, Scott, 2013), that does not reach the final beneficiaries, is avoided.

The fight against poverty goes beyond the model of transfers of resources to states. It is oriented towards mechanisms that allow the allocation of funds for international assistance, that directly needs government structures, that are inadequate and oriented towards different interests for the fight against poverty.

Respect for human rights by local communities is achieved through the human rights impact assessment (HRIA), which avoids conducts that promote and allow the violation of human rights by other subjects involved in cooperation, thus ensuring the active participation of populations in decision-making processes.

Donor countries and beneficiaries demonstrate dignity and offer opportunities for the definition of intervention priorities. In this regard, equality and the rejection of conditionality that limits the sovereignty of beneficiary countries that impose development

models suitable for specific needs are reflected. And this is how the essential elements are identified for the realization of commitments, that are voluntary for the principle of solidarity, through the institutionalization of cooperation for resources for sustainable development as well as the adoption of HRIA, that prevents violations of human rights as well as participation, transparency of decisions and equality between donors and beneficiaries.

Necessary requirements for Euro-Mediterranean relations and systematic analysis in the law of the Union. Coordination mechanisms under international law

The main objectives for the promotion of peace, values and well-being of peoples are concentrated on Art. 3, par. 5 TEU, as a definition of a general vision of the Union.

Solidarity and sustainable development at global level strategically identifies a foreign policy of the Union, which inspires the principles of social and environmental equity. A rule that strengthens the notion of poverty integrates the objective for

the reduction of complementary policies such as the environment, trade, human rights, a coherence of various sectors, that is important for the effective and sustainable approach to the fight against poverty (Cannizzaro, 2021; Liakopoulos, 2025).

Neighbourhood relations, according to Art. 8 TEU, do not exclusively concern the fight against poverty. They frame the relationship of the Union with neighbouring countries thus addressing significant levels of poverty and economic instability. Neighbourhood policies within the context of the Union encourage dialogue and cooperation, that complements poverty reduction measures for bilateral and multilateral programmes with neighbouring countries.

The conditions for promoting a dignified life and social inclusion are elements that make the fight against poverty within a general framework for peace, security, that the Union seeks to promote neighbourhood relations.

In particular, Art. 21 TFEU represents an explicit foundation for the policies of the Union relating to the fight against poverty for external relations. It is established that the Union guides its

external action, which is based on principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms as objectives of support for sustainable development.

Art. 21 TFEU highlights the coherence of the different internal and external policies of the Union, that contribute to the improvement of living conditions of the populations of third countries. The parallelism between internal and external dimension and art. 21 thus promote the economic, social growth and environmental sustainability.

The objective of poverty reduction is considered part of the broad design that includes access to human rights and to the promotion of human dignity. Such a multidimensional vision is in line with the objectives of the Sustainable Development (SDGs) of the United Nations that the Union has also joined (Jensen, 2024).

Art. 208 TFEU followed the policies of the Union establishing the reduction and elimination of poverty as the main objective for development cooperation.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) recognizes the elimination of poverty that remains at the center of the action

for cooperation, resuming the case law of the Lisbon reform⁸ and opening, in such a way, an interpretation that allows cooperation in areas such as the environment, migration, transport, etc.

These are measures that are functional to the achievement of the objectives for sustainable development.⁹ The case law of the CJEU reflects the evolutionary understanding of the concept of development that responds to poverty in a dimensional way. The CJEU has specified that:

“(...) Article 208 TFEU identifies the fight against poverty as a primary objective (...) to include actions that strengthen infrastructure, protect the environment or improve health and education systems in third countries, since all these components are essential for sustainable progress (...)”.¹⁰

8CJEU, 3 December 1996, C-268/94, Portugal v. Council, ECLI:EU:C:1996:461, I-06177. 23 October 2007, C-403/05, Parliament v. Council, ECLI:EU:C:2007:624, I-09045. 20 May 2008, C-91/05, Commission v. Council, ECLI:EU:C:2008:288, I-03651.

9CJEU, 11 June 2014, C-377/12, Commission v. Council, ECLI:EU:C:2014:1903, published in the electronic Reports of the cases.

10CJEU, 11 June 2014, C-377/12, Commission v. Council, op. cit.

The notion of international cooperation fights poverty. The same holds with the inspiring principles that derive from international law and are traced through the primary law of the Union. In this context, it proceeds the analysis of the Euro-Mediterranean relations, which verifies the fight to poverty as well as ensures the theoretical framework and its implementation.

International cooperation in the Mediterranean shows the standards, that indicate in a binding way the implementation of international actions for the fight against poverty.

New forms of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and shared well-being

The first step towards new forms of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation at a global level dates back to the Paris Summit of 1972.¹¹

¹¹European Parliament, Resolution on the outcome of the conference of the Heads of State or Government of the member countries of the enlarged Community held in Paris on 19 and 20 October 1972, Official Journal of the European Communities, No C 129/23, 11/12/1972.

It is a global policy that, however, did not produce multilateral agreements for an integrated cooperation with states south of the Mediterranean.

The idea of strategic policy in the Mediterranean area began with the Declaration of Barcelona in 1995, which represented an important moment for the evolution of Euro-Mediterranean relations by building a partnership with the countries of the eastern and southern Mediterranean.

The important commitment was to build a relationship of stability, and economic prosperity in the region (Hakura, 1997). The related declaration was based on some main objectives such as political dialogue, security, social, cultural and human dialogue and even financial and economic cooperation.

The partnership was based on economic agreements with states in the Mediterranean basin and international cooperation as an element that represented the use of the notion with partner countries, developing countries that recognize an equal relationship between Mediterranean countries.

The Barcelona Declaration was based on the promotion of regional peace and stability through political dialogue for cooperation and security committed to the principles of the Charter of the UN. It also strengthened security cooperation. States were committed to protecting human rights through the instrument of partnership that built a common security area for political stability essential for social and economic development. An economic and financial cooperation that encourage economic growth through a model of embedded liberalism (Ruggie, 1982) that promoted trade, growth of private income, well-being and:

“(...) mitigate the negative social consequences that may result from such adaptation, encouraging programs in favor of the poorest populations (...)”.¹²

In the area of financial assistance, the states of the Union have made a financial commitment through the MEDA program (*Mesures d’Accompagnement*).¹³ It supported structural reforms

¹²Barcelona Declaration, adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference, 27-28 November 1995, p. 6.

¹³Council Regulation (EC) No 1488/96 of 23 July 1996 on financial and technical measures to accompany (MEDA) the reform of economic and

to improve economic governance as well as the development of infrastructures in the Mediterranean countries.

Financial assistance thus shows great criticality for the partnership. The approach of the Union thus presents a form of paternalism for interference in internal affairs of other partners due to the use of the financial conditionality framework.

The MEDA programs and the disbursements of funds are conditioned by specific economic and administrative reforms for the beneficiary countries such as economic liberalization measures, transparency for the management of resources and the fight against corruption.

Conditionality thus appears as a tool for the promotion and protection of human rights in relation to Euro-Mediterranean relations, which thus represents an obstacle to cooperation and damages to the well-being of needy populations (Cremona, Hillion, 2006; Cremona, 2008).

social structures in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, OJ L 189, 30.7.1996, pp. 1–9: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/1996/1488/oj/eng>. Accessed on 22.06.2025.

The level of financial support for the MEDA program is important¹⁴ because it respects the needs of Mediterranean countries. The lack and reduction of aid from the entities as well as the distribution of resources in a not fair and transparent way, has limited the impact on cooperation policies and contributed to asymmetric cooperation. In this spirit, expectations have been added for the creation of a free trade area for the structural depths in the Mediterranean region.

Mutual respect for the different cultures in the region for the one part and the objectives that included cooperation within an educational and cultural framework on the other hand contrast with the prevention of radicalism.

The MEDA programs made the basis for an intercultural dialogue that promotes social and common cohesion, that also includes migration for states that recognize the value of circulation of

¹⁴Council Regulation (EC) No 2698/2000 of 27 November 2000 amending Regulation (EC) No 1488/96 on financial and technical measures to accompany (MEDA) the reform of economic and social structures in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, JO L 311, 12/12/2000, pp. 1-8.

people and cultural growth, that provides forms of cooperation for irregular immigration linked with readmission agreements.

The partnership objectives promote intercultural dialogue, the perception of threats that are linked with security and management of migratory flows and the fight against terrorism that shifts attention to a policy of control and security in the Mediterranean region.

The Declaration of Barcelona is consistent with the requirements that indicate international cooperation that goes against poverty and forms of shared well-being for political tensions between states, to build and ensure the functioning of an institutional framework in order to implement forms of cooperation that are inspired from the principle of solidarity.

The Declaration of Barcelona was the basis for international assistance that fights poverty maintaining cooperation that adheres to the standards of solidarity and equality. The attempt of the Union promotes and goes beyond democratic values and human rights that characterize a policy of a cultural nature.

The asymmetry between donors and recipients generates a diffusion for the Mediterranean partners as well as the effectiveness of projects that are promoted.

Regional integration between Mediterranean countries is sufficient for regional trade that is very limited. The Union thus favors bilateral relations for individual countries and promotes an approach that includes cooperation within the scope of PEM.

The objectives of the partnership have not reached fruitful conclusions for the region. The arguments, in this regard, highlight from a normative point of view, a scope of innovation for the Barcelona process, that is an institutional framework that represents a valid attempt to realize a cooperation, that is inspired by a promotion based on basic needs in the Mediterranean area.

The partnership works have also had a subsidiary character from other different bodies such as the Euro-Mediterranean conference of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs that had the task of defining precise actions to reach objectives that were foreseen by the declaration.

It is also noted, within this spirit, the Euro-Mediterranean committee that was composed of ministerial officials and the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) that was composed of representatives of Mediterranean partners and a quarter of representatives that were designated by Member States of the Union. Overall, the Barcelona list represents a path of cooperation able to interpret the needs of a civil society.

Neighbourhood Policy and ongoing Euro-Mediterranean dialogue

The European Neighbourhood Policy started in 2003 within the Union by integrating the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership into a broad political framework. Among its main objectives are the promotion of stability, security, sustainable economic development in the neighbouring areas by establishing a shared well-being zone.¹⁵

¹⁵Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, OJ L 310, 9.11.2006,

The Neighbourhood Policy consolidates political and economic relations by integrating measures to address development and poverty challenges in the partner countries. The Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument is based on funds that are foreseen for external assistance instruments of the Union such as the MEDA programme.

For the period 2014-2020 we have the ENI program that has strengthened in a differentiated way the neighborhood program to an amount of 15.4 billion euros.¹⁶ This instrument has financed bilateral, regional projects with the additional purpose of sustainable development. ENI has also included green transition programs such as strengthening governance, promotion and social inclusion contributing to the reduction of economic and social inequalities of the Mediterranean countries.

pp. 1–14.

¹⁶Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument, OJ L 77, 15.3.2014, pp. 27–43.

The program thus highlights the neighborhood policy as a valid cooperation tool for combating poverty through financial instruments, also implementing specific actions to address socio-economic challenges to improve living conditions in the Mediterranean.

Within this framework, the THAMM program has also facilitated access to education and technical training, contributing to the reduction of youth unemployment.¹⁷

Within the spirit of economic growth, the environmental protection of the SwitchMed program has developed sustainable industries and renewable energy. They were funded as interventions that improved water management as well as to address challenges related to climate change, thus contributing to improving the quality of life in vulnerable countries.

¹⁷Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa: https://trust-fund-fo-africa.europa.eu/our-programmes/towards-holistic-approach-labour-migration-governance-and-labour-mobility-north-africa_en. Accessed on 22.06.2025.

The funds for sustainable development of the south neighboring countries help the community of vulnerable people by emphasizing that the negative aspects of European liberalism are part of cooperation against poverty, as confirmed by the relationships with partner countries.

Already the 2011 review introduced the principle of the more for more and the Union tried to reward the funds that were greater for countries, which implemented the economic structural reform, necessary to ensure free trade that promotes the protection of human rights in a coordinated and effective way. These are forms of participation in civil society as well as of identification of measures that are implemented within the monitoring and implementation of HRIA.

The conditionality clauses in the strict sense and the less for less approach have frustrated the efforts of international cooperation. The neighborhood policy within the Mediterranean region highlights the limits of this policy as well as the standards relating to international cooperation against poverty.

The vision of the Union to institutionalize the related Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, as a central element, affirms solidarity and equality for international cooperation. This is a differentiated approach that stimulates bilateral agreements that can support the achievement of economic objectives for the fight against poverty, also considering the conditions of inequality in the relative relations between partner states and the Union.

On the other hand, the practice of the related bilateral agreements is understandable and concludes the same literal data of Art. 8 TEU, which provides for the establishment of a space of prosperity that is located in cooperation zones of a non-homogeneous nature.

The leading role of the neighbourhood policy is played with the conclusion of bilateral free trade agreements, generating thus a cooperation mechanism and a variable geometry between state parties.

The free trade agreements from 2010 strengthen the economic relations of the Union between the Mediterranean countries, through the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers, thus creating

an open and commercial environment.

In the Mediterranean area the EU has started the first negotiations of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA), which had as its subject the European single market. It promoted a regulatory convergence that stimulated economic growth and employment.

The major difficulties of it are highlighted in Morocco and Tunisia at the time of the lack of effective involvement of civil society in the European normative power. The negotiations were varied and the provisions of the draft agreements included an automatic adjustment for the Union rules regarding the functioning of the internal market.

The limits of negotiation derive from the analysis of the related negative impacts and the risk of economic dependence that arose from these agreements that were considered as collateral effects related to liberalization and the implementation of association agreements (Mouley, Gariorek, 2019).

International cooperation is effective for an inclusive approach that takes into account the economic and social peculiarities of

partner countries that include safeguard clauses for vulnerable sectors and technical and financial support for the reforms that are requested.

The participation standards, HRIA and equality in international relations are essential within the scope of bilateral agreements as long as the Union action complies with primary law for soft law rules.

A soft law model for continued institutionalized cooperation in the Mediterranean

From what we have understood from the previous paragraphs is that the neighbourhood policy and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership are two different things of a non-Eurocentric multilateral cooperation.

Their main difference is evident in the construction of Euro-Mediterranean relations that realize the sharing of resources for the satisfaction of essential needs and people as indicated by Art. 11 IPESCR. It is an institutionalization of international relations that allow the passage to cooperation based and inspired on the

principle of solidarity (Abi-Saab, 1998).

The Mediterranean region is often found in the European agenda for relations between Mediterranean states within the Mediterranean context of the EU. The Declaration of Paris¹⁸ and the Marseille Guidelines¹⁹ have defined an institutional framework for the Union, for the Mediterranean countries of a multilevel governance.

The EU is based on the principle of equality. It has adopted approaches linked with specific projects that take decisions through consensus. As a high-level decision-making body, it is the summit of heads of state and government who meet every two years, thus determining the political direction of the Union for the Mediterranean to a two-year work that indicates a list of regional projects.

¹⁸Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, held on 13 July 2008: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/>. Accessed on 22.06.2025.

¹⁹Final declaration adopted at the end of the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Union for the Mediterranean, held in Marseille on 3 and 4 November 2008: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/>. Accessed on 22.06.2025.

The lack of a political summit and geopolitical difficulties have diminished the path of formation of the body that emerges through a complex structure and institutionalization of the Union for the Mediterranean with meetings and gatherings of senior officials that are part of the Marseille guidelines. These have introduced the joint permanent committee to assist their meetings and especially to ensure the follow up of their management meetings.

The co-presidency system that is shared between a representative of the Union and a Southern Mediterranean partner shows the principle of equality and ensures guidance for political and strategic decisions.

The appointment of co-presidents is a more complicated job since it concerns European partners and a commitment of the Union in external relations, which did not take into account the presence of the President of the European Council within the architecture of the post-Lisbon system.

Similar difficulties concerned the Southern Partners Summit as an obstacle that was overcome since 2012 with the participation

of Jordan as a co-president state within the side of the Union that attributed the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Common Security Policy.

The continuous work of the Union for Mediterranean as guaranteed by the Secretary General and permanent technical body and responsible for the project comes out from the cooperation between the members of the Union for the Mediterranean and the actors that were involved such as international organizations and civil society.

The participation of civil society organizations and local actors favored the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM). Thus the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (APEM) was completed as a consultative body that was composed of members of the European Parliament as well as parliamentarians from the Southern partner countries.

The Union for Mediterranean was not part of the formalization model for the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue that defined the legal nature for aspects that are part of an international organization and of the soft international organization that supports

cooperation and allows the Union to survive despite the continuous crises recalling the old objectives of the Barcelona process, as the key to the institution achieved in time.

The institutional architecture is complex and guaranteed the achievement of some standards that identified international cooperation as well as rights and groups of people in need. Already the general secretariat, in the period 2012-2018, consolidated the governance of the Union for the Mediterranean thus promoting ministerial meetings, supporting work for the bodies of the entity and realizing sectoral cooperation such as energy, climate change, employment, etc.

The stability of the relative mandates starting from 2012 guarantees the autonomy of the work of the Union for the Mediterranean as common interests of the partners to a vision of a Euro-centric nature. The decisions and principles have guided the relative actions of the entity that finalizes the precise actions to achieve sustainable development for the countries of the South.

From 2016-1770, FM-labelled projects were implemented, i.e. projects of regional initiatives that were in line with strategic objectives for the political priorities of the Union for the Mediterranean, as well as generating benefits for citizens within the Mediterranean region.²⁰ The model of the Union for the Mediterranean cooperates the actions of a partner that builds a space of well-being to ensure basic needs for people, vulnerable groups of people and sustainable development in the Mediterranean basin following the trend of nature identified in international law and in the law of the Union that addresses the issue of poverty at a multidimensional level.

The Euro-Mediterranean programmes have had as their objective the UFM, which identified specific results for citizens, i.e. improved access to essential services, the creation of job opportunities, planning and sustainability. The funds earmarked

20UfM Ministers of Foreign Affairs, UfM Roadmap for Action. The Union for the Mediterranean: an action-driven organisation with a common ambition, 23 January 2017:

<https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/UfM-Roadmap-for-action-2017.pdf> . Accessed on 22.06.2025.

for regional development reach the recipients of the phenomenon of phantom aid. On the other hand, the relative involvement of other international organisations as regional and local support of a civil society acts as a tool that guarantees and respects the fundamental rights of local populations.

The Secretary and the Senior Officials carry out the human rights impact assessment during the approval of the projects. The strategic projects are in the fight against poverty, thus highlighting that the Union for the Mediterranean is part of the international cooperation sector.

This institutionalisation acts as an international actor that repairs the political conflicts and diplomatic tensions that exist for the South-South relations as well as those of North-South. These conflicts continue to represent a profile that limits international cooperation and the fight against poverty with Mediterranean countries.

In this spirit, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is remembered, which has represented a continuous obstacle for the meeting of the summit of heads of state and government as well as of

diplomatic activities for the Union of the Mediterranean.

The annual reports tend to limit the conflict and work towards the solution of the two-state solution,²¹ which goes beyond the relative commitment to provide assistance and protect civilians. The objectives of the fight against poverty and the protection of vulnerable groups and people build the desalination in Gaza which was voted by APEM in 2017 and financed by European partners.

The South-North relations have always been troubled. Geopolitical problems and political choices are taken by northern states with criticisms aimed at the failure to provide the promised resources (Johansson-Noguès, 2011).

The standards were based on the equality of international cooperation for the fight against poverty as a requirement, from a theoretical point of view, that achieved precise results within the scope of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Thus, a risk budget was

²¹UfM Secretariat, Annual Report 2023: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/publication-speech/annual-report-2023/>. Accessed on 22.06.2025.

found for the Eurocentric Union for the Mediterranean, which recognized the European partners as the main supporters for the projects of the institution through a direct grant, which played the role of institutional funds for international financing.

Principles of sustainable development, agenda for the Mediterranean and cooperation

After the Covid-19 pandemic, a new agenda has opened in the Mediterranean proposed by the Commission and by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs for Security Policy to respond to the political, social, environmental and cultural challenges that make it urgent to relaunch relations with the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood.²²

²²Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood - A New Agenda for the Mediterranean, JOIN (2021) 2 final of 9 February 2021.

The communication for the Commission reflects and strengthens Euro-Mediterranean cooperation taking into account the geopolitical changes, economic inequalities and strategic priorities that are outlined in the European Green Deal and in the 2030 Agenda of the UN.

The new agenda for the Mediterranean has considered that the countries in the Neighborhood together with the use of funds for the Union allocate cooperation in the Mediterranean region within the scope of the financial plan that has been provided for by the regulation for the Neighborhood, Development Cooperation and International Cooperation Instrument of the Union-Europe Global (NDICI).²³

The related Communication of the Commission affirmed a perspective of a multilateral Mediterranean policy that affirms an importance for South-South cooperation in the diplomacy of the

²³Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009.

Union. The agenda recognizes the central role of the Union for the Mediterranean in regional cooperation that guarantees the resources of the NDICI attributed to the Union for the Mediterranean as it stated:

“(...) EU will also be ready to explore further regional, sub-regional or trilateral cooperation and joint initiatives between partner countries across the board (...)”.

It is noted that the related agenda for the Mediterranean was launched at a stage of continuous dialogue between Israel and Arab states that was interrupted after the attack of 7 October 2023 and the military operations in the Gaza Strip as well as in the Israeli-Lebanese conflict that began on 17 September 2024.

The new agenda for the Mediterranean focuses on the model of cooperation that seeks to reduce inequalities and promote sustainable development through strengthened dialogue with the countries in the southern Mediterranean.

A theoretical approach that supports the overall financial allocation of about 80 billion euros for seven years that is used to finance projects that tackle the root causes of poverty thus

promoting social inclusion that ensures social and economic growth.

The neighbourhood policy is limited to the fight against poverty addressed as economic deprivation and social exclusion due to the lack of access to fundamental rights (Madanipour and others, 2015).

The new agenda for the Mediterranean updates the neighbourhood policy and confirms the role of the Union as a global and main actor for the objectives of the 2023 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs). And in particular poverty reduction, access to education, gender equality, reduction of inequalities, etc.

The new agenda is a link between poverty and environmental degradation. After 2021 the Union has intensified its efforts to promote the transition to a green economy that recognizes environmental sustainability to reduce inequalities and improve vulnerable populations.

The funds for the neighbourhood policy have been implemented through the blue Mediterranean partnership and the related

SwitchMed program that support the Union for the Mediterranean and the development of the sustainable blue economy and the promotion of green industrial practices.

The related measures proposed, the new agenda for the Mediterranean fails to overcome the asymmetric dynamics that have characterized the neighbourhood policy. The equality and the reciprocal nature that is affirmed through the communication of the European Commission and the positions of the Council²⁴ and the Parliament²⁵ clash with a reality of the Union that has a dominant position in economic and political terms. This is an asymmetry that in different ways starts from the setting of cooperation tools reflecting the strategic priorities for the interests of the Union and the needs of the partner countries.

²⁴Council Conclusions on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood-A New Agenda for the Mediterranean, 19 April 2021.

²⁵European Parliament recommendation of 14 September 2022 to the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – a new agenda for the Mediterranean (2022/2007(INI)), OJEU C 125/154, 5 April 2023.

Aid remains tied to conditionality and the adoption of economic and regulatory reforms with European standards that represent an obstacle for the southern Mediterranean countries and struggle capacity with socio-economic reforms.

The dependence of European funding reinforces a relationship of subordination that limits the for partners to define their own priorities for development.

Euro-Mediterranean relations confirmed, through a new agenda and as a focus of the control of migratory flows, show the commitment that promotes local development as a tool that reduces irregular migration. European migration policies continue to influence an approach that privileges and strengthens borders that respect economic opportunities in the countries of origin.²⁶

²⁶European Commission, Press Release: IP/23/388, Memorandum of understanding EU-Tunisia:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3887.

Accessed on 22.06.2025. “(...) The European Union shall endeavour to provide sufficient additional financial support, in particular for the provision of equipment, training and technical support necessary to further improve

The neighbourhood policy proceeds towards a sharing of responsibilities within the Euro-Mediterranean area that responds to the ambition of the treaties building thus a space that goes beyond the realization of a cooperation that fights poverty in a multidimensional context. It is an external action of the Union that is far from reaching the essential standards for international cooperation against poverty.

The main problem of the neighbourhood policy is that it represents a Eurocentric aspect to the security demands for the Member States that are interested. The Euro-Mediterranean dialogue does not present forms of institutionalization that influence the demands of individual Member States towards a construction of a space of common well-being in the Mediterranean.

the management of Tunisia's borders (...)"

Conclusions

From the previous paragraphs we have understood that international cooperation supports and achieves the objective of fighting poverty and international actors that respect the minimum standards for soft law acts related to the objectives for sustainable development.

Cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean area confirms the appropriate standards for a practice in international cooperation against poverty, that is consistent with a theoretical framework. An international cooperation that is promoted both at international and European level deals with poverty guaranteeing the construction of a space of prosperity and peace.

The rules and soft law acts of the Union confirm the scope of external action, as well as the existence of obligations that are in contrast with poverty in a multidimensional sense that includes respect for human rights by imposing on the Union the respect of even minimum standards in relations with international partners and in the phase of concluding agreements both of soft and hard law type within a planning for the provision of development aid.

Cooperation is consistent with the objectives of sustainable development and decisions are transparent with partners that guarantee participation in

civil society carried out by the HRIA taking into account the rights for local populations.

The developments of the Barcelona Process and the programmes of the Union for the Mediterranean highlight the international relations of an institutionalised nature which guarantee the affirmation of the principle of solidarity which creates international cooperation capable of combating poverty.

The Neighbourhood Policy has promoted cooperation that has taken into account the relevant needs of Mediterranean partners and people in need as confirmed by the New Agenda for the Mediterranean that has been based on common values of the Union and on several pillars, such as the promotion of human rights, good governance, the rule of law and the achievement of adequate living standards, as well as support for economic development that has included digital transition and green.

It has continued with cooperation in the field of security and conflict resolution, migration, mobility, etc. The funds are provided for a Neighbourhood Instrument appropriate to the purposes set through cooperation with the Union for the Mediterranean and the funds that are earmarked for actual beneficiaries.

The critical elements are linked to a Eurocentric vision and to an asymmetry in North-South relations that hinder the implementation of cooperation that meets the identified standards. The work of the Union as an international actor in the dialogue with states of the Mediterranean basin is adequate to respect the objectives and standards proposed by the neighbourhood policy financed by actions, programmes of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The neighbourhood policy is considered within the perspective of a complex set of agreements promoted to a negotiation phase that has a Eurocentric vision. The poverty instrument guarantees the opportunity for growth for neighbouring countries. The evolution of the neighbourhood policy as well as the alignment with the European agenda finds space for the environment and the protection of human rights.

International cooperation in the fight against poverty in the Mediterranean area shows that the Union for the Mediterranean represents a model of cooperation through resources that are made available to the states of the North in order to contribute to the promotion of adequate living standards for people in need.

The successes of the Union for the Mediterranean within the scope of

projects for the fight against poverty guarantee respect for human rights confirming the initial reflections relating to institutionalized forms for cooperation.

The institutional architecture of the Union for the Mediterranean allows and implements projects that are in contrast with poverty. Starting from the ministerial meetings of 2016 and thanks to the continuous work of the general secretariat, the relative standards of a mandatory nature for the partner states of the Union for the Mediterranean are adopted, which are essential for international assistance against poverty.

The Barcelona period has concluded and other matured paths have followed that have delivered a positive balance for the criticisms and conflicts that hindered international relations in the region of the Mediterranean area.

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